

# **A CORRELATIVE STUDY OF MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING CHINESE ACCORDING TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND PARENTAL ENCOURAGEMENT AMONG GRADE FOUR TO GRADE SIX STUDENTS AT LADPRAO BILINGUAL SCHOOL (LBS), BANGKOK, THAILAND**

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**Abstract:** Parental encouragement has been shown to have a positive relationship with students' learning motivation and their academic achievement. This study examined the level of the students' Chinese learning motivation, the student's perception of parental encouragement and the relationship among parental encouragement, Chinese learning motivation and academic achievement. The researcher used a questionnaire as the main instrument for data collection. One hundred and thirteen students at Ladprao Bilingual School (LBS) grades four to six in the academic year 2014 participated in this study. The collected data were analyzed by mean, standard deviation, and Pearson-Moment Correlation. The findings indicated that the level of the students' Chinese learning motivation was high. Also, the students had a relatively high level of the perception of parental encouragement. The findings showed that a significant relationship existed among the students' Chinese learning motivation and academic achievement, students' perception of parental encouragement and Chinese learning motivation, students' perception of parental encouragement and academic achievement. Recommendations for both practice and future research are provided.

**Keywords:** Motivation for Learning, Academic Achievement, Parental Encouragement, Second Language Acquisition, Learning Theories.

## **Introduction**

Family members' behaviors, lifestyles, learning attitudes, educational levels, as well as parents' educational methods and expectations for their children's education and other factors influence students' interests in learning and have long-term effects on children's learning (Chen, 2010). For young children, family is the cradle and parents and older siblings are their first teachers. Parents' words and acts have both direct and more subtle influences on their children. Family environment is important for a child's healthy growth. The family is the primary environment for students to grow. Therefore, the family environment is critically important for children to grow healthily.

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The children's learning motivation largely reflects their parents' desires (Center on Education Policy, 2012). The requirements of parents regarding their children's learning play a huge role on their children's learning motivation, especially for young learners for whom most of their positive learning motivations come from external influences (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1994). According to Honig (1975), parental involvement is very important for young children. Parents' involvement in their children's learning can improve students' academic achievement. However, to the author's best knowledge, very few publications can be found that discuss the issue of the parental encouragement in enhancing learning motivation in Chinese as a foreign language at primary level in Thailand. Since there have been no studies in Thailand on this issue in this way, the researcher felt that this study could help to resolve the main problem of lack of motivation to learn Chinese among primary students in Thailand.

This research focused on the students' integrative and instrumental motivation as well as the level of the students' perception of parental encouragement, and sought to determine the relationships between Chinese learning motivation and parental encouragement, parental encouragement and academic achievement and Chinese learning motivation and academic achievement in Chinese language learning.

The study surveyed the students who were studying in the second semester of the academic year 2014 at Ladprao Bilingual School, Bangkok, Thailand. It only included Grade four to six students. Ladprao Bilingual School was opened in 2000 under the auspices of Ladprao General Hospital. With the wishes of the community in mind, the school was set up to teach in a bilingual fashion. The school follows the curriculum arranged and approved by the Thai Ministry of Education. Ladprao Bilingual School divides Chinese studying into three stages. The students at kindergarten learn Chinese language as an elective course, only if the student is interested. From primary level, Chinese is a compulsory course. The students in primary 1-2 take Chinese one 50 minute class each week. The primary 3-6 students, study Chinese twice a week, totaling 1 hour 40 minutes.

The researcher interviewed some non-Chinese students in Ladprao Bilingual School and they indicated that Chinese is a very difficult language to learn compared with the other languages. This is especially so for young learners. They are likely to lack a strong motivation to learn Chinese. So, how to develop students' motivation for learning Chinese is the matter of concern. There are some possible reasons to be considered.

Therefore, this study aimed to examine the relationship between grades 4-6 students' motivation and their perceptions of parental encouragement at Ladprao Bilingual School; the relationship between grades 4-6 students' perceptions of parental encouragement and their academic achievement in learning Chinese at Ladprao Bilingual School; the relationship between grades 4-6 students' motivation and their academic achievement in learning Chinese at Ladprao Bilingual School.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### *Cultural Capital Theory*

Bourdieu (1983, as cited in Underwood, 2011) implied that students not only depend on course knowledge but also their "cultural capital" (i.e. their speech, style, mode of dress and other habits) to receive academic rewards.

Patterson and Heywood (as cited in Xiao, 2006) studied some parents of K-8 students who are immigrants in Canada. Among parents, who may believe that they, indeed, are the ones to blame for their children's academic failure in their studies, researchers believe that the conclusion is parents' cultural and socioeconomic status would extend and support their children's education.

### *Motivation for Learning Theory*

Motivation leads behavior toward a specific target. Social cognitive theorists propose that individual behavior should be guided by the goals that people set for themselves. Learning motivation plays a crucial role in language learning (Dörnyei, 1994; Gardner & Lambert, 1959). Motivation leads to the learners striving for particular goals (Maehr & Meyer, 1997). So motivation affects how the learners make their own choices; for example, whether to learn Chinese or English, whether to spend time finishing a challenging homework assignment or playing with friends.

### *Gardner's Social Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition*

Gardner in his 1972 account of the socio-educational model Gardner, & Lambert, (1972), wrote that motivation to learn a foreign language derives from a number of factors which are interrelated. In his work, he focused on the foreign language classroom. In 1985, Gardner created the motivation test made up of over 130 items including integrative orientation, instrumental orientation, parental encouragement and others. This instrument was named *the attitude motivation test battery (AMTB)*.

Gardner argued that goal setting is a necessary stimulus to increase and direct motivation for language learning. He classified two main motivational orientations.

*Integrative orientation.* It refers to the desire of the learner to participate in the target language culture, to integrate and accommodate their life to a new community through use of the target language. A learner who has the inspiration to learn, would like to communicate with the other language group, and has a positive attitude toward the language learning process (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003).

*Instrumental orientation.* It means a more concrete reason for learning the target language, such as praise from others, or a language requirement. It is the way to learn a second language (L2) when the students are not interested in communication with the members from the target language community. Dörnyei, Csizér and Németh (2006) defined instrumental motivation as follows.

Instrumental motivation is the learner stimulus to acquire the language through the uses of the languages for utilitarian objectives (Gardner, 1985). In 1972, Gardner and Lambert reported that instrumental motivation focuses on considering the functional reasons for learning the target language like getting a high-salary job, or higher rank. *Extrinsic motivation* refers to the motivated behaviors that occur when engaging in an activity to receive some extrinsic reward or avoid a punishment. *Intrinsic motivation* involves behaviors motivated by an internal desire to perform a particular task.

### *Parental Encouragement of Learning*

Based on Gardner's Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition and the research issues discussed in this paper, there is another important variable that

affects students learning motivation, i.e., parental encouragement for learning language.

Gardner and his colleagues carried out studies for over forty years of parental encouragement. Gardner demonstrated that parents can influence the children to do well in the class when learning a language, and express their negative or positive attitudes toward the people or group that speak the language by encouraging them or using open questions (Gardner, 2010). He wrote that parents may see the benefits of learning a language – e.g., getting a good grade, getting into a college or university - and directly pass the sentiment on to their children. .

#### *Parental Involvement and Motivation*

Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) demonstrated that not all types of parental involvement have a positive link with student learning motivation and called for further studies probing various aspects of parental involvement and different elements of student achievement motivation.

Accordingly, one study of this topic was university students' learning motivation affected by their family background such as family structure, their functions, culture values and other psychological factors like self-determination. For example, Lumsden (1994) showed that the parents and home environment played a significant role in students' motivation. They were an important factor in shaping the students' attitudes toward learning, and could also improve attitude. Lumsden also noted that children from homes that encouraged a sense of self-worth, competence, autonomy and self-efficacy were more likely to accept the challenges involved in learning difficult material. Gottfried, Fleming and Gottfried (1994) supported this trend and emphasized that parental encouragement of children's learning was a causal influence on their motivation and achievement. Accordingly, parents encourage children's persistence in their study and effort to achieve good results, and their curiosity and exploration in specific subject areas.

#### *Learning Motivation and Academic Achievement*

There are many studies that investigated varied populations, from childhood to adolescence and indicated that that higher academic motivation leads to significantly greater academic achievement (Gottfried, Gottfried, Cook & Morris, 2005). Bank and Finlapson (1980, as cited in Tella, 2007), also found that compared with unsuccessful students, successful students have significantly higher motivation for achievement Brophy (2004) found that if the students showed negative interest in the subject, it would affect their ability to learn. Motivating factors, including interest and attitude, led to learners' higher achievement.

#### *Parental Involvement and Academic Achievement*

Muola (2010) argued that that everyone strives to be successful. Bongenschneider (1999) stated that parental involvement in students' learning aids academic achievement. Regardless of parents' gender, educational level and the child's gender, ethnicity or family structure, the students who had more parental involvement in their learning had better academic achievement. Parental involvement works on every child. Salami (2010) studied college students and found that academic success was

the main basis to judge the potentialities and capabilities of the students and it was a major goal for them. Academic success also was a way for selecting educational advancement and employment. Janjetovic & Malinic (2011) indicated academic achievement as the outcome of training passed by the teacher to the students in the school setting.

## Method

### *Population and sample*

In consideration of the students' cognitive development the population of this study was the Grade 4-6 students in Ladprao Bilingual School. The sample was those students in grades 4-6 during June-September of the year 2014. This comprised all 113 students in the selected grade levels.

## Instrument

### *The research instrument consisted of 3 sections:*

A cover letter which explained the purpose of the research and noted that the research outcomes would not be used for any other purposes than this research.

A demographic section which collected the respondents' gender and grades. The questionnaire itself, comprised of three sub-scales –integrative orientation, instrumental orientation and parental encouragement - from The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, 1958, 1960).

### *Validity and Reliability of AMTB*

As mentioned, this study used two goal orientation components and parental encouragement from the AMTB (Gardner, 1958, 1960). Table 1 shows the number of items for each dimension and the alpha coefficients reported by Gardner (1985), Chalak (2010), Tahaineh & Daana (2013) and the current study.

**Table 1: Reliability Alpha Values of Questionnaire Components**

Component	Number of items for each component	Gardner 1985 Alpha Values	Chalak 2010 Alpha Values	Tahaineh & Daana, 2013 Alpha Values	This Study Alpha values (N=113)
Integrative Orientation	4	.73	.93	.58	.56
Instrumental Orientation	4	.62	.86	.92	.81
Parental Encouragement	8	.79	.78	.89	.56
Total	16				

In the research by Gardner (1985), the AMTB was validated and standardized on a sample of Anglophone Canadian students learning French. Dörnyei (2001) noted that the AMTB has good construct and predictive validity and can be used as a

standardized motivation test. The AMTB has been successfully applied in many studies of the social-psychological aspects of second/foreign language learning motivation. Chalak, in studying Iranian students, noted that the AMTB can be used with different samples with reasonable confidence for gaining commonly reliable scores. Similar robust reliability results were found by Tahaine and Daana (2013), when they used AMTB components of motivation and attitudes towards learning English in studying Jordanian students.

The AMTB has many different forms. The original forms were developed by Gardner (1958, 1960). It was later extended with added variables by Gardner and Lambert in 1972. After that, Gardner and Smythe (1975) conducted validation studies of the AMTB, leading to the present version of the instrument (Gardner, 1985).

The AMTB has many sub-tests, including attitudes toward French Canadians, interest in foreign languages, attitudes toward European French people, attitudes toward learning French, integrative orientation, instrumental orientation, language learning anxiety, parental encouragement, motivational intensity, and several other variables related to language learning (Gardner, 1985). This researcher used only the Integrative Orientation and Instrumental Orientation for language learning variables as well as the parental encouragement variable. The other components of the AMTB are not relevant to this research.

A five-point likert scale used to find the students' motivation and parental encouragement score. There were 8 total items for motivation and 8 items for parental encouragement. Therefore, the motivation score ranged from a low of 8 to a high of 40. Likewise parental encouragement score ranged from a low of 8 to a high of 40. Table 2 shows Interpretation Scores of Each Variable on the Learning Chinese Questionnaire.

**Table 2: Interpretation Scores of Each Variable on the Learning Chinese Questionnaire**

Score	Interpretation
4.21-5.00	Very High
3.41-4.20	High
2.61-3.40	Moderate
1.81-2.60	Low
1.00-1.80	Very Low

#### *Chinese Achievement Test*

The test was constructed by the Chinese teachers in Ladprao Bilingual School. In order to assess validity, the researcher asked three Chinese teachers to assess the test. The three Chinese teachers were from different schools: St. Mark's International School of Bangkok, Ascot International School and Rajwinitbangkhaepankhum School. All three Chinese teachers were teaching Chinese from academic year 2014-2015. All three stated that the test was valid for the selected students and grade levels.

#### **Procedure**

To conduct this study, the researcher requested permission from the principal and the Grades 4-6 homeroom teachers of Ladprao Bilingual School. Firstly, distributed to

the students from Grade 4-6 students in Ladprao Bilingual School, in August, 2014. Then, the researcher collected questionnaires, from 113 students. For the scores of examination, the students from grades 4 to 6 in Ladprao Bilingual School were asked to complete the achievement test on September 8-10, 2014.

### Findings

This research used both descriptive and correlation statistics.

Table 3 shows the levels of grade 4-6 students' motivation for learning Chinese at Ladprao Bilingual School.

**Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Subscale/Item of the Students' Chinese Learning Motivation (N=113)**

Chinese Learning Motivation	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
<b>Integrative Orientation*</b>			
1 Studying Chinese is important because it will allow me to be more at ease with people who speak Chinese. (1)	3.92	.942	High
2 Studying Chinese is important because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people. (2)	3.90	.953	High
3 Studying Chinese is important because it will make me more educated.(4)	3.62	.937	High
4 Studying Chinese is important because I will be able to interact more easily with speakers of Chinese. (5)	3.87	1.001	High
Integrative Orientation Total	3.91	.675	High
<b>Instrumental Orientation*</b>			
5 Studying Chinese is important because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate the Chinese way of life.(3)	3.96	1.008	High
6 Studying Chinese is important because other people will respect me more if I know Chinese.(6)	3.61	.920	High
7 Studying Chinese is important because I will need it for my career.(7)	3.58	.951	High
8 Studying Chinese is important because it will be useful in getting a good job.(8)	3.69	.952	High
Instrumental Orientation Total	3.60	.816	High
Motivation Total	3.76	.633	High

Table 3 indicates that the highest mean score of students' motivation for learning Chinese in Ladprao Bilingual School was item 5 (M=3.96). The lowest mean score was item 7 (M=3.58). The total mean score was 3.76. Based on the interpretation of the motivation scores given above in Table 2 it can be said that motivation for learning Chinese of the respondents was high.

Table 4 shows the levels of grades 4-6 students' perceptions of parental encouragement for learning Chinese at Ladprao Bilingual School.

**Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Subscale/Item of Perception of Parental Encouragement (N=113)**

	Parental Encouragement	M	S.D.	Interpretation
1	My parents have stressed the importance Chinese will have for me when I leave school.	3.84	.774	High
2	My parents encourage me to practice my Chinese as much as possible.	3.58	.832	High
3	My parents are very interested in everything I do in my Chinese Class.	3.74	.924	High
4	My parents urge me to seek help from my teacher if I am having problems with my Chinese.	3.61	.901	High
5	My parents try to help me to learn Chinese.	3.75	.882	High
6	My parents think I should spend more time to studying Chinese.	3.75	.829	High
7	My parents feel that it is very important for me to learn Chinese.	3.83	.833	High
8	My parents feel that I should continue studying Chinese all through school.	3.89	.799	High
	Total	3.74	.561	High

Table 4 indicates that the highest mean score for the students' perception of parental encouragement was item 8 ( $M=3.89$ ). The lowest score was item 2 ( $M=3.58$ ). The total mean score was 3.74 and based on the interpretation scores for the questionnaire variables in Table 2 it can be said that perception of parental encouragement for learning Chinese among the respondents was high.

Table 5 shows the relationship between grades 4-6 students' perceptions of parental encouragement and their academic achievement in learning Chinese at Ladprao Bilingual School.

**Table 5: Pearson Correlation Between the Students' Academic Achievement and Level of Parental Encouragement (N=113)**

		Parental Encouragement	Conclusion
Academic	Pearson Correlation	.482**	There is a significant relationship
Achievement	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

\*\* Sig < .01

The result shows that  $r = .482$  and sig. was .000, indicating that the relationship between students' academic achievement and level of learning motivation was a moderate positive relationship.

Table 6 shows the relationship between grades 4-6 students' motivation and their academic achievement in learning Chinese at Ladprao Bilingual School.



**Table 6: Pearson Correlation Between the Students' Academic Achievement and Learning Motivation in Learning Chinese (N=113)**

		Motivation	Conclusion
Academic Achievement	Pearson Correlation	.517**	There is a significant relationship
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

\*\* Sig < .01

The resulting data shows that  $r = .517$  and sig. was .000, indicating that the relationship between students' academic achievement and level of learning motivation was a strong positive significant relationship.

### Discussion

The researcher demonstrated that the grades 4-6 students in Ladprao Bilingual School had a relatively high level of learning motivation. Learning motivation plays a crucial role in language learning (Dörnyei, 1994; Gardner & Lambert, 1959). Motivation can be seen as the learner's orientation to achieve the goal of learning a second language. According to Gardner's study in 1972, motivation can be divided into two types: integrative orientation and instrumental orientation. Integrative motivation is the positive attitudes and feeling about the target language population and desire to use the target language to communicate with its native speakers. Instrumental motivation is based on the desire to obtain some social or economic reward through second language learning achievement, so it is a more functional reason for language learning.

The researcher found that the grades 4-6 students' perception of parental encouragement was relatively high. Parental encouragement is another very important factor for students' learning. Parents want their children to succeed and so always use encouragement and positive words as well as supportive action to inspire their children to make improvements. They use their love and cheer their children to try the best to study. Even when they show the bad performance, they offer encouragement and support as well. Students are more likely to achieve their full potential when their parents actively encourage them to explore their interests.

The study also found that there was a significant relationship between grades 4-6 students' motivation and their academic achievement in learning Chinese. It showed that LBS primary school students differed significantly in their academic achievement based on their learning motivation. The results revealed that the students who had high motivation performed better than those who had low motivation.

The study demonstrated that there was a significant relationship between grades 4-6 students' perceptions of parental encouragement and their academic achievement in learning Chinese. At LBS, students were influenced by two cultures, Thai and western. From the researcher's observation, Thai culture had a greater impact on the students at LBS. In Thai culture, from childhood, children are taught to obey and respect their parents. They learn Thai customs and traditional behaviors from their parents and the other family members who stay with them, the children carry on their family's pride and reputation (Clark, 1979).

This study found that there was a significant relationship between grades 4-6 students' level of motivation and their perceptions of parental encouragement at

Ladprao Bilingual School. Gottfried, Guerin & Gottfried (1994) also found that there was a significant relationship between parental involvement and their children's educational development and even their intrinsic academic motivation. Furthermore, parental encouragement can be considered another form of reward. Children need to receive more positive feedback from parents and teachers to encourage them. This will enhance the children's intrinsic motivation (Sansone, Sachau & Weir, 1989).

### **Recommendations**

The researcher strongly recommends that administrators, teachers and parents become aware of the concepts of learning motivation and parental encouragement which are related to success in studying Chinese. The findings suggest that the home-school contact and communication should be strengthened, so that parents are more involved in students' learning and endeavor to understand their children's Chinese language learning. Teachers should explain to parents the school's educational program, educational objectives, teaching methods and daily activities, so that parents have the general understanding of what the children learn and do at school. Parents can also tell the teacher about their family background, economic and living conditions. The principal and administrators should encourage parents to tell the school their concerns and ideas in their mind.

The research was conducted only with grade 4 to 6 students of the Ladprao Bilingual School and the findings cannot be generalized other schools. Therefore, a primary recommendation for future research is to conduct larger studies in terms of both grade levels and additional schools, both governmental and private in Thailand. Also, since the current study sought to measure only that parental encouragement may have an effect on the motivational level of the students, more tests will be needed to verify how parental encouragement impacts on Chinese learning motivation and academic achievement. Finally, further research on ethnic heritage-related learning motivation, academic achievement and parental involvement are necessary.

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